

ME

Eban's Letter to Thant on the Status of Jerusalem

UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., July 11 — Following is the text of a letter to Secretary General Thant from Foreign Minister Abba Eban of Israel about a General Assembly resolution calling on Israel to rescind her actions altering the status of Jerusalem:

My Government has given careful consideration to your letter of 5 July 1967 concerning resolution 2253 of the General Assembly. Israel's position on Jerusalem was explained by me at the plenary meetings of the General Assembly on 21 and 29 June 1967. In response to your letter, the Government of Israel now takes the opportunity of reviewing recent developments in the city. As a result of aggression launched by the Arab states against Israel in 1948, the section of Jerusalem in which the holy places are concentrated had been governed for 19 years by a regime which refused to give due acknowledgment to universal religious concerns. The city was divided by a military demarcation line. Houses of worship were destroyed and desecrated in acts of vandalism. Instead of peace and security, there was hostility and frequent bloodshed. The principle of freedom of access to the holy places of all the three monotheistic religions was violated with regard to Jews but not to them alone. Reports in 1949 and 1950 of the Jordan Government informed the ad hoc Political Committee at the fourth and fifth sessions of the General Assembly, on 6 December 1949 and 11 December 1950, that it would not agree to any special arrangements for the Holy Places. This policy was the subject of a reference by the President of the Trusteeship Council, M. Roger Barreau, in his report on the mission entrusted to him by the United Nations. The Council resolution of 4 April 1950, in which he stated:

I have to state with the deepest regret that up to yesterday, when my term as President of the Trusteeship Council came to an end, the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan had not seen fit to break its silence.

The Government of Israel showed a spirit of conciliation which led it to submit to the Trusteeship Council certain new proposals which represent a considerable advance toward a settlement of the various aspects of the problem of Jerusalem and the holy places.

On 5 June 1967, the Jordanian forces launched a destructive and unprovoked armed assault on the part of Jerusalem outside the walls. This attack was made despite Israel's appeals to Jordan to abstain from hostilities. Dozens of Jerusalem citizens were killed and hundreds wounded.

Artillery bombardment was directed against synagogues, the Church of Dormition, hospitals, centers of secular and religious learning, the Hebrew University and the Israel Museum. Intensive fire was directed against institutions and residential centers from positions in and near the holy places themselves, which were thus converted into military positions for shelling Jerusalem.

Holy Places Open to All
Since 7 June, the entire city of Jerusalem has experienced peace and unity. The holy places of all faiths have been open to access by those who hold them sacred.

The resolution presented on 4 July by Pakistan and adopted on the same date evidently refers to measures taken by the Government of Israel on 27 June 1967. The term "annexation" used by supporters of the resolution is out of place. The measures adopted relate to the integration of Jerusalem in the administrative and municipal spheres and furnish a legal basis for the free access to the holy places in Jerusalem.

The Proceedings In the U.N.

SCHEDULED FOR TODAY
(July 12, 1967)
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Meets at 3 P.M.

Tickets may be obtained at the public desk, main lobby, United Nations Headquarters. Tours: 9:15 A.M. to 4:45 P.M.

I come now to specify the character and effect of the measures adopted on 27 June:

1. The Holy Places

The Protection of Holy Places law 5727-1967 provides that "the holy places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings with regard to those places. Whoever desecrates or other violates a holy place shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of seven years."

During the previous 19 years there had been no such legislation to protect the holy places in Jerusalem. Since 27 June, sacred buildings desecrated since 1948 have been restored, and houses of worship destroyed during the Jordanian occupation are being rebuilt.

2. Civic Cooperation

One of the most significant results of the measures taken on 27 June is the new mingling of Arabs and Jews in free and constant association. The Arab residents within the walls had been cut off for 19 years from all contact with the residents of the newer parts of the city. Today they are free to renew or initiate contacts with their Jewish neighbors in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel. The residents of the city outside the walls now visit the old city.

There is a profound human and spiritual significance in the replacement of embittered hostility by normal and good relations between the two communities. It is especially appropriate that

ecumenical habits of thought and action should take root in the city from which the enduring message of human brotherhood was proclaimed with undying power in generations past.

3. Municipal Services

In the hills of Judea, where Jerusalem is situated, there is an acute shortage of water. The old city is now connected with the general water supply system, and all houses are receiving a continuous supply of water, double the quantity available to them in the past.

All hospitals and clinics are already functioning. In the past no health services existed for the young within the framework of the school system, nor were there any health stations for mother and child care. These services are now being established.

There was no social welfare system in the Old City. Today all the inhabitants of Jerusalem now enjoy the same welfare rights. The municipality has already begun extending its welfare services to those for whom none have been available in the past.

School buildings are being prepared for the resumption of studies at the beginning of the new school year. Teachers are being lodged and arrangements made for them to return to their work. Their salaries are paid by the municipality.

4. The Universal Interest

Compulsory education regulations have been extended to all parts of the city. None of those arrangements affect the existing private education network.

If these measures had not been taken, the holy places would be without legal protection. The unified public utilities services would not exist. Municipal and administrative facilities would not be extended to some sections of the city, and Jerusalem's residents would still be divided, hermetically confined in separate compartments. It is the duty of my Government to secure the protection of the holy places are only a part of Israel's effort to insure respect for universal interests in Jerusalem.

It is evident from United Nations discussions and documents that the international interest in Jerusalem has always been understood to derive from the presence of the holy places.

Israel does not doubt her own will and capacity to secure the respect of universal spiritual interests. It has forthwith insured that the holy places of Judaism, Christianity and Islam be administered under the responsibility of the religions which hold them sacred. In addition, in a spirit of concern for historic and spiritual tradition, my Government has taken steps with a view to reaching arrangements to insure the universal character of the holy places. In pursuance of this objective, the Government of Israel has now embarked on a constructive and detailed dialogue with representatives of universal religious interest. If these explorations are as fruitful, as we hope and expect, the universal character of the holy places will for the first time in recent decades find effective expression.

The changes which have affected Jerusalem's life and destiny as a result of the measures recently adopted may therefore be summarized as follows: Where there was hostile separation, there is now harmonious civic union. Where there was a constant threat of violence, there is now peace. Where there was once an assertion of exclusive and unilateral control over the holy places, exercised in sacrilegious discrimination, there is now a willingness to work out arrangements with the world's religious bodies—Christian, Moslem and Jewish—which will ensure the universal religious character of the holy places.

The Government of Israel is confident that world opinion will welcome the new prospect of seeing this ancient and historic metropolis thrive in unity, peace and spiritual elevation.